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New York

President: Mr. Udovenko ..... (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 16

Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections

(d) Election of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme

Note by the Secretary-General (A/52/695)

The President: I invite members to turn their attention to the note by the Secretary-General in document A/52/695, dealing with the election of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme.

In his note the Secretary-General informs the Assembly that he wishes to nominate Mr. Klaus Töpfer to be Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for a four-year term beginning on 1 January 1998. However, I have been advised by the Secretary-General that the effective date for the beginning of his term of office should be adjusted to 1 February 1998.

Accordingly, may I take it that the General Assembly wishes to elect Mr. Klaus Töpfer Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for a four-year term beginning on 1 February 1998?

It was so decided.

Mr. Mahugu (Kenya): Allow me, on my own behalf and on that of my Government, to extend our warm congratulations to Mr. Klaus Töpfer on his election as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Mr. Töpfer is well known to this Assembly. We recall the skilful manner with which he handled his portfolio as Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development. This, coupled with his experience in the areas of government and academia, gives us confidence that he brings to UNEP a wealth of experience for championing the global environmental cause.

We are all aware that poverty is both a cause and an effect of environmental degradation. As noted during the special session, much still remains to be done in fulfilment of the Earth Summit goals, specifically due to lack of adequate and predictable financial resources and environmentally sound technology transfer.

Mr. Töpfer assumes the stewardship of UNEP at a time when the United Nations reform process is being undertaken. These reforms, among other things, are geared towards streamlining the United Nations system, with its funds and programmes being revitalized and strengthened to achieve greater effectiveness, efficiency and transparency. We reiterate the pivotal role of UNEP as the principal body in the field of the environment. It is expected that during the ongoing United Nations reforms, this role will be strengthened.

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This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

The task ahead of Mr. Töpfer is not an easy one. We are, however, confident that we will be able to measure up to his responsibilities by ensuring the effective and efficient discharge of his duties. Among the major problems that UNEP has continued to face over the years are lack of funding, decentralization of environment-related secretariats and financial and management bottlenecks. My country believes that Mr. Töpfer's credibility, as well as his commitment to global environmental issues, should be complemented with undivided support from both the developed and the developing countries. We should accord him all the necessary resources, without which his commitment will not bear fruit.

He will, among other things, require adequate, stable and predictable funding to enable him effectively to address the outstanding environmental problems.

Kenya, on its part, will continue to provide the necessary support, as well as an enabling environment, for the Executive Director to perform his functions to the best of his abilities. We are fully committed to continue supporting the United Nations Environment Programme at UNEP headquarters at Nairobi and we should like to know how best the Executive Director would like to be assisted. We say: "Welcome to Kenya, Mr. Executive Director".

Mr. Wahab (Pakistan): On behalf of Ambassador Ahmad Kamal, the Permanent Representative of Pakistan, I have the honour to read out this statement:

> "I would like to congratulate Mr. Klaus Töpfer on his unanimous election to the post of Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It is indeed a recognition of Mr. Töpfer's significant contribution in the field of environmental protection. We also consider that the election of Mr. Töpfer is an acknowledgement of the role that Germany has played in promoting the goal of environmental protection within the United Nations framework.
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> "The Pakistan delegation would also like to express its sincere appreciation for the work of the outgoing Executive Director, Ms. Elizabeth Dowdeswell.
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> "Pakistan has actively participated in all the United Nations activities relating to environmental issues. At the Rio Conference, it had the honour to represent the Group of 77 and China. We attach great importance to the implementation of Agenda 21. We believe that the United Nations Environment Programme can play a significant role in realizing the objectives of the Agenda.
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> "I would also like to recall the declaration adopted by the Ministers of the Group of 77 and China last September. They reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening UNEP as the leading global environmental organization and urged developed countries to support UNEP with adequate and predictable financial resources. The Ministers expressed their resolve not to countenance any measure that would weaken UNEP in any form.
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> "The developing countries would like to play their due role in strengthening the United Nations Environment Programme. We hope that, in the appointment of the Deputy Executive Director of the Programme, the principle of fair geographic representation will be observed."

The President: We have thus concluded our consideration of sub-item (d) of agenda item 16.

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/52/467 and A/52/581)

Draft resolutions (A/52/L.54, A/52/L.55 and A/52/L.62)

Amendments (A/52/L.63)

Mr. Wolzfeld (Luxembourg) (*interpretation from French*): I have the honour the take the floor on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia — and the associated country Cyprus, as well as Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

Early in this decade, the Madrid Conference and the Oslo process opened the way to mutual recognition between Israel and its neighbours and to a negotiated peace in the whole region. The people of the Middle East could finally envisage the possibility of being able to live in peace, security, mutual respect and dignity on the lands which they share.

Unfortunately, the tremendous hope that arose at that time has been dashed in recent months and one might fear that the peace process has thus been jeopardized. The absence of progress in the negotiations, the lack of implementation of the agreements reached, and the upsurge of acts of violence against civilian populations have compromised the confidence which the people of the region had in the peace process and provoked an acute feeling of frustration among them.

For too many people in the region, the daily reality remains one of poverty, insecurity and despair. Last October, following the efforts of the sponsors of the peace process, the parties met again after a long interruption of the talks. We hope that the parties may thus progressively restore the mutual confidence and resume the negotiations in a spirit of perseverance and cooperation.

For its part, the European Union calls upon the parties to honour the obligations and agreements which they have contracted in the framework of the Madrid and Oslo process, fully to implement the Israeli-Palestinian agreements already concluded and to reject any unilateral initiative that could delay or hinder the peace process.

In this context, we reiterate our opposition to the development of settlements in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, as well as our attachment to cooperation in the field of security and in the fight against terrorism. The European Union reaffirms its position on the status of Jerusalem. East Jerusalem is subject to the principles set out in Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which affirms in particular the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

The European Union considers that it is also necessary to advance on the other tracks of the peace process in order to break the current deadlock and to create a climate of confidence among all the parties. Indeed, the stagnation of the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the process threatens everyone's security.

The European Union will therefore continue to support the resumption of the negotiations between Israel and Syria and the opening of negotiations between Israel and Lebanon that fully respect the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of this country. We have repeatedly called for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Lebanon and have advocated cooperation with the United Nations forces present there.

We also wish to confirm our support for the multilateral track of the peace process, which will have to play an important role in order to complete and to promote the bilateral negotiations. In this context, the European Union will take an active part in the works of the regional working group for economic development and of other multilateral groups.

The European Union will continue to see to it that the task of the peace-builders is brought to fruition, through the relations of friendship and trust which it maintains with the various parties and by intensifying its engagement on the diplomatic level, including through its Special Envoy for the peace process in the Middle East. In particular, we intend to facilitate the resumption of the talks by contributing to the adoption of a code of good conduct between the Israelis and the Palestinians, as well as to the adoption of confidence measures.

We consider that the economic and social progress in the region, as well as the substantial improvement of the plight of the population, constitute an essential part of the peace process. The European Union has been the main donor to the Palestinian population for several years.

The European Union is convinced that no alternative exists to the peace process in the Middle East. The commitments which were made in Madrid and Oslo — which must be fully implemented — constitute an historic opportunity to restore a just and lasting peace to a region which has been deprived of it for such a long time.

The foundations upon which this peace will be built are well known and were established in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978): the right of all States and peoples of the region to live in peace within safe and recognized borders, the respect for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to decide their own future, the exchange of land for peace, the non-acceptable character of the annexation of territory by force, the respect for human rights, the rejection of terrorism in all its forms, and good-neighbourly relations. To this is added the respect of the existing agreements and the rejection of any counterproductive initiative.

For its part, the European Union will continue its efforts to convince the parties to relaunch a constructive dialogue in order to achieve the just, lasting and comprehensive peace to which we all aspire.

Mr. Gold (Israel): Discussion about the situation in the Middle East requires a broad analysis of the major forces affecting the principal developments across the region. It also requires a careful reading of the specific issues that are addressed under this item. It is critically important to recall that the current peace process had its genesis in a unique confluence of events and trends which occurred in 1991.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc in Eastern Europe put an end to global super-Power competition. The Arab-Israeli conflict could finally be apprehended as a major regional issue devoid of high-stakes dividends for the great Powers. True, this did not diminish the complexities of the conflict within its regional setting. Nevertheless, a solution to the conflict was no longer deemed a zero-sum game by nations which were not in the region but which had their own agendas.

Iraq, which had invaded and annexed Kuwait, had just been defeated by a multinational coalition of forces. Iraqi aggression had confirmed in fact what most had known in theory — namely, that the true threat to many Arab States lay not in Israel but in militarily strong and anti-status-quo regimes far closer to their own borders, which still accept the use of force as a legitimate instrument to affect their international positions.

Iran was still recovering from its eight-year war with Iraq and had not begun to fully assert itself as a regional Power.

Today this situation has changed to a great degree. We once again find that not all of the world's Powers are in agreement regarding the Middle East. The global consensus against the most formidable anti-status-quo Powers has been shaken. The world Powers are engaged in a mixture of competition and cooperation that regional actors hope to manipulate.

Iran now engages in forcefully exporting its own brand of radicalism. Israel has witnessed its effects in the continuous flow of arms to Hezbollah in the Lebanese Bekaa, from where they are fired into northern Israel. But we are not alone. Branches of Hezbollah have been springing up across the region, many of which train in Iran itself. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have also felt the effects of the long arm of Iranian-sponsored subversion.

There are those who claim that the current regime in Tehran is more moderate and more practical than its predecessor. Would this be the case, then many in our region, and not only in Israel, would look forward to greater tranquillity. However, wishing something to be does not make it so; it is incumbent upon us to see the world as it is and not only as we would like it to be.

For example, on 28 September of this year, the current Iranian Foreign Minister granted an interview to the *Los Angeles Times*. In response to a question regarding the circumstances under which Iran might deign to recognize Israel, he responded: "We don't recognize Israel." When pressed further by his interviewer, he replied: "I can't imagine Iran could recognize Israel as a country."

Regarding any peace with Israel, the official Iranian news agency carried a report on 28 September 1997 which stated, *inter alia*:

> "Today almost all regional countries, with the exception of a few, have realized the truth of what the late Imam Khomeini meant when he said that, 'Israel is a cancer on the body of the Muslim Ummah and it must be eradicated.'"

These are the winds of change that have been identified as emanating from Tehran. Iran's total rejection of Israel and its revolutionary adventurism make its military buildup so troubling. The marriage between its readiness to engage in regional activism and its quest for weapons of strategic reach should be a source of concern for all States interested in the stability and security of the Middle East as a whole.

Yet, in spite of these voices, which find their echoes in the Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad, as well as in the Lebanese Hezbollah, Israel is determined to move forward with the peace process. Moreover, it is important to emphasize in this context the words of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who repeatedly stated that despite our conflict with extremist groups, Israel rejects the notion that Islam has replaced Communism as the new enemy of the West. Prime Minister Netanyahu stated this firm view in Hebrew before the Israeli Knesset and in English before a joint session of the United States Congress in 1996.

We have begun working with the Palestinians on joint committees with the goal to implement the Interim Agreement. We have proposed the second of three further redeployments. Foreign Minister Levy and Mr. Abu Mazen met just yesterday in order to explore ways

to reinvigorate the peace process. All this will come to nought, however, if the voices of reason are overpowered by fanaticism and violence. We expect the Palestinian Authority to make the utmost effort to combat terrorism. Security cooperation is not a reward which Israel expects; it is a necessary condition for progress.

Similarly, the peace process still holds out the promise of regional economic cooperation which can benefit all who take part. Yet this regional cooperation is not a prize which can be awarded to or withheld from Israel. Regional cooperation benefits all who participate. Those who do so ensure economic and social progress for their people. This is a win-win issue, and Governments which have the best interests of their people at heart know this.

Governments in the Middle East have to ask themselves how they want our region to appear 20 years from now. Do they want rapid economic growth and entry into the high-tech information age to be confined to other regions? Do they want investors to fly from Europe to the Asian economic tigers while skipping over a Middle East still viewed as unstable, turbulent and dangerous? The peoples of the Middle East deserve their fair share of the future world economy; they do not deserve to be condemned to being only a perpetual market for massive weapons sales.

Once again, among the draft resolutions which have been proposed is one which purports to deal with the Golan Heights. This draft resolution prejudges issues which are to be negotiated between the parties and preordains a solution which obviates the need for any discussion between Israel and Syria. As such, this draft resolution is not only irrelevant but actually harms the cause of peace. Israel has its own perspective, but it is ready to listen to the Syrian view, with no prior conditions.

The Golan Heights are a vital security interest of the State of Israel. For 19 years, from 1948 until 1967, villages and kibbutzim in the Galilee were regularly bombarded from Syrian artillery positions on the Golan. Repeated Syrian efforts were made to divert the sources of the Jordan River in the Golan Heights. In 1973 Syria arrayed 1,400 tanks against 177 Israeli tanks as part of its surprise attack, which was halted only at the cost of a grave loss of human lives. To this day Syria continues to have an enormous quantitative advantage over Israel in standing ground formations. It continues to deploy the vast majority of its ground forces near its frontiers with Israel, even though that border is Syria's shortest. That reality must be addressed.

The struggle between Syria's territorial claims and Israel's legitimate security concerns and interests must be resolved, creatively, at the negotiating table. I call on Syria, as have both Israel's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister before me, to return to the negotiating table and engage Israel in good faith. Such a step, more than any resolution adopted in this Hall, will ensure that peace between us will become a reality.

Under the agenda item entitled, "The situation in the Middle East", a yearly resolution on Jerusalem is offered. For the people of Israel, Jerusalem is the centre of our aspirations. It is where our particularism as a people and our universalism to the world meet. For under our control, Jerusalem is open to all faiths. The Jewish people were repeatedly banned from Jerusalem by others but always returned, from the time of the Roman Emperor Hadrian to the present century. Already a Jewish majority in Jerusalem was re-established in 1864, in the period of the Ottoman Empire, before the establishment of the present-day state system in the Middle East. The people of Israel are not strangers or newcomers to Jerusalem; but when they were denied access to Jerusalem, the world was silent. Now that it is open and vibrant, international political forces are making their voices heard. Jerusalem will remain the unified capital of Israel and will thus serve as an open centre to all faiths of the world, to practice in complete freedom with no fear.

Forces that seek to polarize and destabilize the Middle East are more active in 1997 than they were in 1991, when the peace process was launched. But these larger forces are generally missed in today's discussion. The focal point of all discussion tends to be Israel. This is a problem not just for Israel but for the entire world. Sixty years ago the main threat to international security came from the continent of Europe. Today these threats come from the Middle East. Unless they are identified and addressed, they will undermine the well-being of nations across the globe.

It is the free will of the people of Israel to be on the side of peace and progress in Middle East. No nation or organization compels Israel to make peace, despite the dangers in our region.

It was Israel's prophets who bequeathed to mankind a vision of universal peace, and therefore I close with the words of Isaiah, so familiar to many of us, that:

(spoke in Hebrew)

"Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more" [*The Bible*, Isaiah 2:4].

Mr. Donokusumo (Indonesia): The Assembly is considering the situation in the Middle East at a time when the peace process is mired in a serious crisis and at an impasse. The vision of a region finally at peace, with justice and with the secure and stable future promised by the important achievements of the past few years, is being unravelled. The undeniable reality is that the situation in the Middle East today continues to be fraught with tension and poses a threat to international peace and security, despite decades of international attention.

The persistence of this state of affairs can be ascribed wholly to the untenable policies and actions relentlessly pursued by the Government of Israel in contradiction with the principles governing the peace process as they relate to the three tracks of negotiations between Israel on the one hand and Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians on the other.

Over the past year, time and again the General Assembly has turned its attention to the question of Palestine as the core issue of the situation in the Middle East. On 13 November 1997, the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly once again overwhelmingly adopted a resolution condemning the failure of the Government of Israel to cease the building of a new settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim, to the south of East Jerusalem. And only a few days ago the Assembly extensively considered the question of Palestine and expressed its views in no uncertain terms on the Government of Israel's continued evasion of the commitments and agreements reached as well as its blatant unilateral measures to impose a *fait accompli* in the occupied Palestinian territory. These unconscionable policies and practices of the Government of Israel have led to mounting frustration and despair among the Palestinian people and have resulted in the present setback to the peace process.

The Government of Israel has displayed the same manifest lack of commitment to the peace process with respect to the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the negotiations. Thus, the sovereign territory of Lebanon remains under the illegal military occupation of Israel and subject to incessant military operations, in violation of the fundamental principles of international law. It is essential that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon be restored and respected. For this, Israel must immediately withdraw to the internationally recognized boundaries and abandon its continuing pursuit of the logic of war.

With regard to the Israeli-Syrian track of negotiations, Indonesia cannot accept the attempts by the Government of Israel to reinterpret and indeed to step back from the principle of land for peace underlying these negotiations. It is our hope that negotiations between Israel and Syria will resume, leading to full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan. These negotiations should resume from the point at which they were halted, and the two parties should commit themselves to what has already been achieved.

My delegation need hardly reiterate its longstanding position that a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the conflict which has for so long engulfed the Middle East necessarily entails the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). For peace to flourish, there should be total Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied since 1967, the exercise by the Palestinian people of their legitimate right to self-determination and sovereign independence, and respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders. And for peace to be truly meaningful it must also be translated into concrete improvements in the living conditions of the long-suffering Palestinian people; hence, there is an urgent need for economic, financial and technical assistance by the international community. In this regard, the worsening of the Palestinian economy due to the policies pursued by the Government of Israel, including the repeated closure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which constitute a form of collective punishment of the Palestinian people, is indeed a source of profound concern.

Prolonged delay in seeking a durable solution to the endemic Middle East conflict would entail incalculable consequences. The Government of Israel should therefore implement the agreements which have been painstakingly reached, and not backtrack from the agreed principles underlying the peace process. Today, the international community has the opportunity once again to express its unequivocal support for the peace process, for it is the only realistic option for the attainment of durable peace and stability in the Middle East and must therefore be pursued vigorously and with fortitude by all parties concerned. The alternative would see the Middle East region once again plunged into a vicious cycle of violence and chaos.

Mr. Al-Awdi (Kuwait) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The situation in the Middle East is among the most important of international questions. It galvanizes the attention of the States Members of the United Nations because of the region's importance with respect to the establishment of international peace and security. For many years the peoples of the Middle East have suffered the ravages of war, instability and mistrust, which has dissipated efforts towards development and peace and has replaced them with a race to build up military arsenals and to prepare for a succession of wars. This has destroyed all the elements of confidence and security among the peoples of the region. Peace has become a dream, not only for those peoples, but for all the world's peoples.

Mr. Zacharikis (Greece), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The peoples of the Middle East are today deeply concerned at the deterioration of the Middle East peace process that began at Madrid in 1991. Members have followed along with us the regrettable paralysis of that process, the spiralling despair and the increased tension in the region that have come about through mutual recriminations and threats. All of this results from precepts that the Government of Israel has put forward for the terms of reference of the peace process.

Kuwait repeatedly welcomed the launching of the peace process. It also welcomed the bilateral agreements signed, in the framework of the peace process, between 1993 and 1995 by the Palestinian Authority and Israel, as well as the 1994 bilateral agreement between the Governments of Jordan and of Israel. Kuwait has always affirmed the importance of progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks with a view to a solution guaranteeing the rights of all the peoples of the region and based on the recognized pillars of the peace process: Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and the principle of land for peace.

Today Kuwait is gravely concerned at the deterioration and regression of the peace process, especially since the Israeli Government's adoption of positions that run counter to the foundations of the peace process laid at Madrid. We in Kuwait understand well the gravity of the Israeli Government's continued pursuit of its current practices, which are a stumbling block to progress in the peace process and for the attainment of its objectives in the Middle East. The Government of Israel has abandoned the norms and principles of the Madrid conference and has replaced them with extraneous factors that contravene the rules unanimously accepted by the international community as a framework for the peace process.

Moreover, Israel has not kept its commitment to implement the bilateral agreements signed with the Palestinian Authority and has not withdrawn from the occupied Palestinian territories, as called for under those agreements. Israel, the occupying Power, continues its old policies, which violate international law and international norms, including the imposition of a policy of closure and of the collective punishment of the Palestinian people, and the ongoing annexation and Judaization of Arab Jerusalem with a view to changing the demographic character of the Holy City — the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This year we have seen Israel's intransigent refusal to respond to the will of the international community that it put an end to its settlement policies in East Jerusalem, in particular its persistence in the establishment of the Jebel Abu Ghneim settlement south of East Jerusalem, a matter on which the General Assembly has adopted four resolutions.

Here we reaffirm our support for the convening of a meeting of High Contracting Parties of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to consider the application of the Convention to the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, as soon as possible. We call on the two co-sponsors of the peace process to make a greater effort to revive the peace process with a view to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

In that context, we welcome the recent efforts of the Secretary of State of the United States, Mrs. Madeleine Albright, to move the negotiations between the Palestinian National Authority and the Israeli Government towards progress. We pay tribute also to the endeavours of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in this regard.

Israel must recognize that the peace process is an indivisible whole that cannot be separated into parts. Kuwait thus emphasizes the importance of Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan, which has been occupied since 1967. This is essential for the success of the Middle East peace process. Israeli withdrawal from the Golan is also a litmus test for Israel's good faith and its desire to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. The negotiating process must be carried out within the framework of the peace process, in good faith, with respect for the rights of others, and with mutual trust. In

that connection, we support Syria's call for the resumption of the negotiations at the point at which they were interrupted.

Kuwait also supports Lebanon's position that Israel must implement all provisions of Security Council 425 (1978), withdraw unconditionally from Lebanese territory, which Israel now occupies, and work towards ensuring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon. Kuwait will always stand by its brethren, the Government and the people of Lebanon, in their call for unconditional Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon to enable the Lebanese people to achieve their aspiration to live along with other peoples in the region in tranquillity and stability. The time has come for Lebanon to be given a genuine opportunity to resume its well known role in consolidating the foundations of comprehensive development and progress in the region.

The Arab peoples have now no other strategic choice except just, lasting and comprehensive peace. But the Israeli Government continues to make every effort to frustrate our peoples and to destroy their hopes for the attainment of real peace. It is time for Israel to recognize that if it wishes to live in stability, it must observe the rights of others, commit itself to the concluded agreements, evince goodwill, shun provocation and deal with questions in an enlightened manner that does not harm principal parties to the peace equation in the Middle East.

Finally, I would like to stress Kuwait's firm position in support of the peace process in the region. This emanates from our belief that peace is a worthy objective that deserves our patience because of its positive effects on the peoples of the region, who yearn for permanent and genuine peace, which will bring with it dividends of development, prosperity and stability.

Mr. Çelem (Turkey): Turkey considers the Middle East peace process, initiated in the recent past, as the single most important positive development in the fragile political environment of that region. We have placed much hope in it for ensuring an increasingly peaceful and prosperous future for the entire Middle East. For that same reason, today we feel most frustrated by the unexpected turn of events that has led to a rupture in the peace process and to the present unacceptable situation.

My delegation stated from this very rostrum exactly one year ago that unfulfilled obligations, terrorism and economic deprivation are the three main obstacles standing in the way of the peace process. In the meantime, nothing has changed.

The grave and deteriorating situation in the Middle East has been the subject during the past year of a series of Security Council meetings and of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly. It is regrettable that, despite the strong appeals of the international community and the weight of the resolutions adopted, a satisfactory and unambiguous breakthrough has not yet been achieved.

Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories, in defiance of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, continue to hold the peace process hostage. Over the past few months my Government has urged the Israeli Government to honour its commitments by ending the construction of new settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. The Palestinians and the Israelis, recognizing that they are partners in this process, have to do their utmost to rebuild mutual trust and confidence.

In the light of the long and dramatic history of the Middle East question, we are all too aware that this will not come easily. It will require far-sightedness and wisdom on the part of the leaders, and goodwill and sacrifice on the part of the peoples. In this respect, we are following with great interest and hope the latest direct contacts between the parties and the new efforts to rekindle the peace process.

The peace process has advanced until now through bilateral negotiations. It may also be correct to assume that bilateral negotiations will again prove to be the only peaceful way out of the present crisis. However, Israel should recognize that its partner in the peace process cannot go on negotiating while at the same time observing Israeli construction activities on the very land that is the principal object of the negotiations. For these negotiations to be conducted in a favourable atmosphere and in good faith, all settlement activities in the occupied territories, starting first and foremost the Jebel Abu Ghneim project, should cease. All the obligations entered into by the two sides must be respected. Only then will the peace process be able to move along the path laid out for it.

At the same time, no one should doubt that terrorism is a fundamental threat to peace. We have seen how it is deliberately used to sabotage peace efforts. Enemies of peace in our region do not hesitate to engage in violence and acts of terror in order to impede reconciliation and to disrupt stability. We emphasize once again the absolute necessity that countries lending support

to terrorism immediately abandon this line. We earnestly urge such countries to refrain from using this scourge of our times as a means of advancing their interests. The policy of terrorism is built upon the blood and flesh of innocent people. Thus, we expect all countries to do everything in their power at the bilateral, regional and international levels to support and contribute to the struggle against terrorism. Turkey is ready to participate in enhanced cooperation in combating terrorism.

Another issue of concern for us is the economic and social situation in the region. Improving living conditions for the Palestinian people, both within and outside the occupied territories, remains another significant goal. Deprivation and poverty are grave problems that have to be surmounted before a favourable atmosphere can be created in which the peace process can flourish. In this regard, closure policies are particularly harmful. Only when a certain level of economic stability and social welfare is achieved will the spirit of cooperation replace existing feelings of frustration and hostility. In the present circumstances, tangible support of the international community in the form of economic, financial and technical assistance to the Palestinian people is of paramount importance.

As a country of the region, Turkey sincerely desires and strongly supports a peaceful, durable and mutually accepted settlement of the Middle East problem. I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate Turkey's commitment to helping the peace process in every way possible and to contributing to the efforts aimed at achieving reconciliation in the region. In this regard, my country has always supported the just cause of the Palestinian people, and we are ready to contribute to all initiatives for a settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

I would also like to reiterate my Government's position on the situation in Lebanon. We attach great importance to the preservation of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of that country. We stress the significance of the full and strict implementation of the Taif Agreement by all parties concerned, and we also underline again the need for full implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). A lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can be based only upon the rights of all States in the region, including Israel, to exist within secure and internationally recognized borders.

We are obviously at a turning point in the history of the Middle East. A great challenge — to heal wounds, achieve reconciliation and build a secure and prosperous future for Palestinians, Israelis and peoples of the region beyond — lies ahead. At the same time, the deep-rooted fears, lack of mutual confidence and real threats to the peace process hover in the background. We believe it is still possible for the leaders, for the peoples and for the countries of the region to make the right choices and to meet this challenge.

My Government appeals once again to all parties concerned to make every effort to give new impetus to the peace process and to move it forward towards its goal.

Mrs. Basmillah (Brunei Darussalam): My delegation is pleased to join others in the debate on this important agenda item. We have long been convinced that there will be no peace in the Middle East without the return of the occupied territories — the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. The international community has emphasized time and again that the Middle East crisis can be solved only through the full realization of the Palestinian right to self-determination.

Initially, we were pleased to see the Middle East peace process move forward positively. Now we are again concerned. Events this year have caused a tremendous setback in the momentum of the peace process. Israel has not been forthcoming in implementing the peace agreements signed in Madrid in 1991 and in Oslo in 1993. The decision by Israel to establish and expand existing Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories is against the spirit of those agreements. It has also had a serious effect on the cultural characteristics and demographic composition of the areas concerned, including East Jerusalem.

These developments and their damaging effects on the trust of the people of Palestine and the Middle East region is most disturbing. Mutual trust is vital for peaceful coexistence. It is in this context that we would like to reiterate our wish to see Israel contribute positively towards the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Middle East problem. We would also like to see the Israelis comply fully with the aforementioned agreements and with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). The right of Palestinians to their homeland

should continue to be upheld, and their sufferings should be ended.

There is no alternative but to proceed with the peace process. It is most essential that repeated delays not be allowed. The accords must be fully implemented. We therefore call upon the international community to provide renewed impetus and encourage progress.

We appreciate the efforts of all the interested countries that have been active in helping the process. I assure the Assembly that Brunei Darussalam will continue to support efforts which contribute to achieving a lasting peace in the Middle East. By this we mean real progress through negotiated settlement.

Mr. Bohaievs'ky (Ukraine): For the past 50 years the United Nations and the world community have undertaken many efforts to resolve various aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which has turned out to be the most intricate and multifaceted one in post-Second World War history. Numerous international attempts to invigorate the Middle East peace process at its different stages have gone through achievements and failures, victories and defeats. However, there has always been hope for something better.

In our view, the peace process is now at its most critical juncture in several years. The continuous deterioration of the situation related to the Palestinian question — the key problem in the Arab-Israeli conflict — has reached bottom. In the course of this year we have witnessed with deep concern the multiplied cycles of violence, suicide bombings and terrorist attacks, which have taken away hundreds of innocent lives. We do not want such developments to go on and on.

A sage of the past once said, rightly, that after falling to the bottom of the abyss one has nothing else to do but rise and climb up again. Likewise, the parties to the Middle East conflict must overcome the current crisis of animosity and try to reach a long-awaited breakthrough. This is achievable only by honouring the terms of the accords signed at the Madrid Peace Conference and the Oslo agreements, and should be done in full accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Any deviation by the parties from their previous commitments may lead to unpredictable consequences, which are not desirable.

Our delegation is of the view that closer cooperation between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority in the field of combating terrorism, while implementing the Oslo and the Hebron agreements, would help them proceed to final status talks. We also hope that a mutually acceptable solution to the challenging and very painful problem of the future of the Holy City of Jerusalem will be finally reached by the parties.

In our view, a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East will remain elusive unless it is supported by adequate measures in the field of disarmament, in particular the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction accumulated in the region. That is why every year the delegation of Ukraine joins the consensus in the First Committee on the resolution on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East.

Israeli-Jordanian relations constitute an important component of the Middle East peace process. In this connection, Ukraine welcomed the signing by the two countries of the Treaty of Peace in 1994, which paved the way for establishing a ceasefire, the mutually agreed international borders, full diplomatic relations, economic cooperation and cooperation in combating terrorism and the special role of Jordan in looking after the Muslim relics in Jerusalem. The normalization of relations between these two countries may serve as an encouraging example for other countries in the region in finding the common language of peace.

The Israeli-Syrian and the Israeli-Lebanese negotiating tracks are also indispensable links in a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East problem. We believe that the problem of the Syrian Golan, which this year marked its sombre thirtieth anniversary, will be settled at the peace talks of the parties, resumed from the point they reached earlier as a result of the policy of compromise.

We cannot be indifferent to the current state of Israeli-Lebanese relations; neither can we hide our concern about the critical humanitarian situation in the south of Lebanon. In this regard, the role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in providing humanitarian assistance to the suffering civilian population, as well as in undertaking measures for its protection, cannot he overestimated. In this context, I would like to confirm the readiness of Ukraine to contribute personnel and, in particular, a military hospital, to the UNIFIL operation.

Taking into account the fragility of the peace process, we are certain that the United Nations and the international community as a whole should effectively prevent any deterioration of the situation in the region. Therefore, Ukraine is deeply gratified by reports about an easing of the tensions caused by the recent crisis between the Iraqi leadership and the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM).

In this regard, we commend the substantial and energetic efforts of the sponsors of the process to defuse the potential conflict. Ukraine firmly believes that only unconditional implementation by Iraq of all relevant Security Council resolutions could eventually lead to the lifting of the current United Nations sanctions against that country.

However, the international community should not disregard the critical humanitarian situation in Iraq which resulted from the imposition of sanctions. In this respect, we welcome the recent recommendations made by the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the oil-for-food programme, which envisage permitting Iraq to increase its oil sales and to get additional humanitarian goods. Needless to say, these humanitarian flows should be delivered to people in need under United Nations monitoring.

In conclusion, it is our sincere hope that at the close of this century the long-standing Middle East problem will eventually find a peaceful solution.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) *(interpretation from French):* For 50 years now the crisis in the Middle East has been a central concern for the international community and has been on the agendas of the General Assembly and of the Security Council. These bodies have adopted many resolutions on the subject, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978) and 497 (1981) which were to have provided a basis and a framework for a permanent solution to the problems of the region.

Notwithstanding these decisions taken by the international community and the many efforts made, the situation is still very precarious in that part of the world.

The Madrid Conference, held in October 1991, brought about for the first time in the history of the region a major easing of the situation by opening the way to direct negotiations between Arabs and Israelis.

At that time, we the international community, had legitimate hopes for the advent of a true era of peace in the Middle East.

We rightly thought that that ancient land of civilizations and convergence, the cradle of revealed religions that had always taught tolerance, would rediscover its age-old vocation of stability, coexistence and cooperative partnership.

We rightly thought that the aspirations of the people of Palestine for self-determination and the building of their national State could finally be realized.

We rightly believed that the question of Jerusalem, Al-Quds al-Sharif, the city of peace and coexistence, would be resolved.

We rightly believed that the Palestinian refugees would be able to return to their villages and towns in honour or to be compensated for the loss of their property.

And, finally, we rightly thought that Israel within its secure, internationally recognized borders, would start to withdraw its troops from the occupied territories of southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan to enter, together with its Arab neighbours, an era of secure coexistence in beneficial partnership.

For all those reasons, we unanimously encouraged, supported and framed the peace process enshrined in the Declaration of Principles and the Interim Agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The signing of the Treaty of Peace between Israel and Jordan and the successful holding of regional economic conferences in Rabat, Cairo, Amman and Doha reinforced the expectations of the international community.

With the significant progress made in recent years on the road to peace, we had reason to believe and to hope that the Middle East could finally enter, towards the end of this century, an era of peace and stability through the reconciliation of the hearts and minds of the peoples of the region.

However, this rendezvous with history seems to have been missed when one examines at the current situation on the ground and the fragility of the peace process.

Israel's refusal, the obstacles it creates in order not to honour its commitments under the peace agreements, its illegal policies of settling Arab lands of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, the frequent closures of the territories, the stifling of the Palestinian economy, the mistreatment of the population and the provocative actions by armed settlers against innocent civilians have heightened frustrations and bred distrust. This situation of tension is harmful to the progress of the peace process. This situation ultimately will prove the enemies of peace right.

The latest initiative to Judaize East Jerusalem with the building of a new Jewish settlement on Arab land in Jebel Abu Ghneim, in a highly symbolic place, is a deliberate provocation in the light of the relevant resolutions adopted by overwhelming majority of the international community at the two urgent meetings of the General Assembly and at its emergency special session.

In order to calm the situation and ensure commitment to peace, all of the resolutions adopted at the two urgent meetings and at the emergency special session of the General Assembly should be implemented by Israel, and Israel should implement the accords concluded in the context of the peace process.

My country, Senegal, remains profoundly convinced that the only peace is that based on international legality, on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, on the fundamental principles established by the Madrid, Oslo and Taba agreements which enshrined the exchange of land for peace and the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and to build a State.

The application of this same principle of land for peace could give the bilateral negotiations between Israel and Syria, on the one hand, and Israel and Lebanon, on the other, an acceptable basis as well as more favourable prospects on the road to peace. Senegal therefore calls upon the parties concerned to negotiate confidence-building measures to revive the prospects for peace for the sake of the liberation of the Syrian Golan and the occupied part of Lebanon.

To encourage the advent of a new dawn of peace in the Middle East, my delegation would like, in conclusion, to stress the need for the sponsors of the peace process to commit themselves more to the adoption of confidence-building measures and, above all, the adoption of initiatives to revive the peace process and thus to save peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): It is most regrettable that the situation in the Middle East continues to remain tense and unstable due to the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict. The prolonged cycle of violence and hostilities, as a direct consequence of Israel's continued illegal occupation of Arab territories, has brought tremendous political, economic and social sufferings and hardships to the people of the region, including the loss of human lives. It has kept the region in an economic backwater and deprived its peoples of enjoyment of the full benefits of development.

The signing of the Madrid accord in 1991 raised hopes of a final breakthrough in the Middle East peace process, especially on the Palestinian-Israeli track. The signing of bilateral agreements between the Palestinians and the Israelis led to, most significantly, the transfer of a number of townships in the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority, the latest being Hebron in January 1997. Regrettably, the Israeli Government's unilateral decision early this year to establish a new Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem injected a new and highly contentious element into the precarious peace process. The policy of settlement, along with other patently discriminatory and punitive policies being pursued by the Israeli Government in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, has led to the virtual derailment of the peace process.

My delegation, along with others, has dealt at length with this issue in this Assembly on previous occasions, including in the debates that have taken place in the last few days. However, it is necessary to reiterate a most important point, which is that permanent peace can only be attained on the basis of negotiations predicated upon mutual confidence and trust, which can only come about if the parties concerned honour the commitments solemnly arrived at.

Even as the international community focuses on efforts to put the Palestinian-Israeli peace process back on track, there is a need to attach similar importance to the other two tracks, namely, the Lebanese-Israeli and Syrian-Israeli tracks, which are integral parts of the overall Middle East peace process.

Clearly, the continued occupation of southern Lebanon by Israel constitutes one of the main stumbling blocks to a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East issue. The continued blatant violation of the sovereignty of an independent Member State of this Organization by Israeli military forces belies Israel's protestations of

peaceful intentions towards Lebanon. Israel's repeated assertion and justification of its military presence there are clearly unacceptable and will only ensure continued hostility between Israel and Lebanon rather than improve the prospects for peace. The representative of Israel himself admitted in this Assembly two days ago the political and military costs to Israel of the two mini-wars in which it was involved in Lebanon. Costly as they were to Israel, the results were far more devastating to Lebanon, both in terms of properties damaged and human lives lost.

The series of military attacks carried out by Israel on many towns and villages in Lebanon last year and this year, including the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon refugee camp in Qana, resulted in the deaths of many innocent people, the wounding of hundreds of civilians, the destruction of homes and properties and the displacement of thousands of its inhabitants. The problems of displaced persons, created in the wake of these attacks, has placed an additional burden on the Lebanese Government, even as it grapples with the monumental tasks of national post-war reconstruction, to which the international community should also extend its support. Malaysia reaffirms its strong commitment to and unequivocal support for Lebanon's quest for peace and security, as well as an end to the occupation of part of its sovereign territory by Israel. The Israeli Government ought to have realized by now that its long-term peace and security can best be guaranteed not by maintaining a military garrison on Lebanese soil but by building a cooperative and constructive relationship with its neighbour, based on mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The understanding reached between President Al-Assad of Syria and the late Israeli Prime Minister Rabin in June 1995 was a historic and important breakthrough in the peace process between Syria and Israel. Unfortunately, what was seen as a positive and significant development that could possibly lead to the eventual resolution of the question of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights captured by Israel during the 1967 Six Day war turned awry following the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin and the subsequent hard-line approach adopted by the Likud Government, thereby stalemating an otherwise promising prospect for a possible settlement of the Syrian-Israeli conflict.

It is the hope of my delegation that serious contacts between the Syrian and Israeli sides can be resumed at an early date so as to bring about the resumption of a full and constructive dialogue between them. We believe that only through the resumption of such a dialogue between the two sides can there be prospects for a final political settlement of the conflict. Malaysia believes, however, that the only basis for a permanent settlement between Syria and Israel will be the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from the occupied Golan Heights and its return to Syria, consistent with the thrust of Security Council resolution 497 (1981).

Malaysia has consistently called for the attainment of comprehensive peace and security in the Middle East on the basis of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. This objective can be attained only on the basis of the principle of land for peace and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from all of the occupied Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian territories. We believe that until peace is finally attained, the United Nations, being the universal Organization that is concerned, *inter alia*, with the maintenance of international peace and security, should continue to be seized of the issue.

Mr. Laptsenak (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): Fifty years ago, in resolution 181 (II) the General Assembly decided to partition Palestine and called for the creation of independent Jewish and Arab States. It also called for the establishment of a special international regime for Jerusalem. For many years our Organization, reflecting the will of the international community, has been making active efforts to settle the Middle East conflict, which has prevented the attainment of the age-old aspirations of the peoples of the region to live in peace and prosperity.

In noting the important role played by the United Nations in promoting the peace process in the Middle East, the delegation of Belarus believes in the absolute right of the peoples of the region to peaceful coexistence in an atmosphere of mutual respect and security. Any deviation, albeit insignificant, from the full and timely implementation of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and subsequent implementation agreements can only postpone the attainment of these rights and slow down the peace process.

In this connection, we cannot fail to be seriously concerned at the ongoing deadlock in the Middle East settlement. The signing on 17 January 1997 of the Protocol concerning the redeployment of Israeli troops in Hebron, the creation at the beginning of February of this year of eight bilateral Israeli-Palestinian sub-committees to consider outstanding questions during the transitional

period and the release of Palestinian women detainees gave us reason to hope for the strengthening of mutual trust between the parties and the creation of favourable conditions for final status talks.

We regret that these hopes have not been realized. The new phase of settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the subsequent resurgence of extremist groups and overall escalation of tension in the region have undermined this positive trend.

Under these extremely difficult circumstances, it is absolutely essential that the parties do everything to refrain from taking unilateral measures that could have a negative impact on the negotiating process. The Palestinians and Israelis should do everything possible to restore mutual trust, revitalize the dialogue for peace and make steady progress throughout the entire transitional period until a permanent settlement is reached.

As was stressed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his report submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/26 on the Middle East:

> "To that end, Israel should refrain from unilateral actions that have the effect of pre-empting the outcome of the talks and the Palestinian Authority should spare no effort in fighting terrorism effectively." [A/52/581, para. 8]

The delegation of Belarus shares that view. It is quite clear that what is on the agenda today is also the immediate resolution of questions that can help restore trust between the Palestinian National Authority and Israel such as the further redeployment of the Israeli troops on the West Bank, the opening of air and sea ports in Gaza, the easing of rules for the transit of Palestinian goods and ensuring safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In particular, we stress the need for active efforts by the parties concerned to combat terrorism effectively in order to develop close and full practical cooperation in the area of security. Terrorism is an extremely serious obstacle to peace in the Middle East. The Republic of Belarus unconditionally condemns terrorism and political extremism in all their manifestations. In our view, the use of such methods cannot promote the attainment of any noble goal whatsoever.

The delegation of Belarus expresses concern at the sharp drop in living standards among Palestinians as a result of the setback in the Middle East peace process. Further worsening of the Palestinians' socioeconomic conditions could lead to an explosive situation that would make peace virtually unattainable. We call upon donor States, the Bretton Woods institutions and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to redouble their efforts to help strengthen the economic structures of the Palestinian territories in order to ease the current situation there as soon as possible.

It is quite clear that genuine peace in the Middle East is impossible without significant progress on the Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel tracks. We hope that Israel and Syria will resume dialogue based on the principle of exchanging land for peace, the gradual withdrawal of Israeli troops and the demilitarization of the Syrian Golan.

Positive movement on the Lebanese negotiating track is likewise of great importance for attaining a comprehensive settlement. We hope that in the near future we can look forward to the start of negotiations between the parties which will lead to the complete restoration of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon on the basis of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

In conclusion, the delegation of Belarus would like to express its profound commitment to a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East on the basis of the formula of land for peace enshrined in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), with full respect for the rights of all States of the region to live in peace within secure, internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The past year has been a difficult one for the peace process in the Middle East. There have been few signs of concrete progress, and today we face a vicious circle of frustration. We must be conscious that the peace process, which began amid so much hope in Madrid in 1991, is now in serious danger.

In this context, Argentina is participating in this debate in order to urge the parties not to abandon the path of negotiation they embarked on together. They must renew their commitment to peace and resume a frank and open dialogue. We believe that this is the only realistic way of resolving the conflict. We encourage the efforts of United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and we trust that her forthcoming meetings with Prime Minister Netanyahu in Paris and with President

Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority in Geneva will give positive impetus to the negotiations.

We are convinced that the principle of land for peace — the essence of the entire negotiating process — establishes reasonable and objective criteria for resolving this long-standing dispute in a just, comprehensive and lasting way. We urge the parties to fulfil in good faith, and on the basis of respect for this principle, the commitments already undertaken in Madrid, Oslo and Washington, with a view to initiating talks on the final status as soon as possible.

Any peace process has as protagonists the parties to the conflict that is to be resolved. The role of protagonist entails certain obligations as well as a firm stand on the importance of not altering the climate of trust that is the prerequisite for progress in any negotiation.

The decision to build new settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, has affected the peace process and prompted the convening of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly. That decision is a unilateral act contrary to international law and its basic principle: the prohibition of the acquisition of territory by force. The construction of settlements also pre-empts the outcome of the negotiations that are yet to begin on the final status of the occupied territories. For these reasons, we urge once again that those measures be reconsidered and that their negative effects be taken into account, in the light of the fact that it is in Israel's permanent and fundamental interest to live in peace with its neighbours.

At the same time, Argentina unequivocally condemns all the acts of violence committed on Israeli territory, which have claimed many victims among the civilian population. Under no circumstances does terrorism constitute an effective response. Its use endangers the entire peace process. Argentina therefore wishes to reiterate once again the right of the State of Israel to live within secure, internationally recognized borders, without acts or threats of violence.

It is of fundamental importance to go beyond the present difficult moment and move into a phase that allows for tangible results to be achieved by the parties. We believe that it is essential to re-establish a climate of trust among them. Without trust, no compromise solution, however reasonable and well-balanced, can succeed. Extreme positions must be avoided, for they lead only to isolation and condemnation and prevent Palestinians and Israelis from becoming partners in peace.

The bilateral negotiations were, and we hope will again become, the driving force in the peace process. Nonetheless, they do not preclude the role of the United Nations, which has a special responsibility towards Palestine and a positive part to play in promoting a peaceful solution. Over the past 50 years the contributions made by the United Nations have been undeniable, through peacekeeping operations, programmes of economic, social and humanitarian assistance or the personal commitment of its Secretaries-General to the cause of peace.

Argentina has supported and will continue to support the work of the United Nations by participating, as it has done for many years now, in peacekeeping operations and, more recently, through the "White Helmets" initiative.

It is important that progress be simultaneous on every track of the peace process. Argentina, therefore, considers it essential to resume the peace talks between Syria and Israel that were suspended in February 1996. Nor can we conceal our grave concern at the situation in southern Lebanon. Argentina reaffirms its commitment to the territorial integrity, political independence and full sovereignty of Lebanon, in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

The Madrid accords of 1991 were a historic step, producing as they did a profound change in expectations. For the first time in many years, the men and women of the Middle East felt the hope of a shared future of peace, stability and progress. We appeal to the parties not to betray those expectations and to embark once again on the path of negotiation, dialogue, tolerance and law.

Mr. Wilmot (Ghana): During the Assembly's review of the situation in the Middle East last year, my delegation expressed its gratification at the positive developments which had culminated in the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Accord on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on 28 September 1995, followed by the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area, the initiation of the Palestinian Authority in those areas and the redeployment of the Israeli army from six cities in the West Bank. These developments had generated great expectations and hope among the population of the occupied territories in particular, and the international community in general, that a lasting

peace would at last be established in the region. These expectations were further enhanced by the signing on 15 January 1997 of the Protocol concerning the Redeployment in Hebron.

It is against this background that my delegation expresses its grave concern at the virtual cessation of further implementation of the interim self-government arrangements freely entered into by the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. We are particularly concerned about the settlement policy of the present Israeli Government. As is well known, on 2 August 1996 the Israeli Cabinet decided to cancel the previous Government's restrictions placed on the development of settlements since 1992. Since then, the Israeli Government has embarked on a systematic confiscation of Arab-owned land, the expansion of settlements and the construction of bypass roads and quarries. New settlements have been built, and we learn that their total number in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is around 194. We further learn that settlement expansion in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan is also envisaged.

The most serious development in this regard is the decision taken in February this year to build 6,500 Jewish housing units in Jebel Abu Ghneim. This project, which is intended to complete the chain of Israeli settlements encircling Arab-populated East Jerusalem, has brought the peace process to a halt. We are deeply concerned about this development.

The frustration caused by the construction of settlements has been further aggravated by the implementation of other measures by the Israeli Government, including the revocation of the residency rights of the Palestinian Jerusalemites. We learn in this connection that some 60,000 to 80,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites stand in danger of losing their residency rights. The Israeli policy in this regard is obviously calculated to reduce the Arab population of Jerusalem and thereby change the demographic situation on the ground.

We wish the General Assembly to reaffirm the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force under international law and the Charter of the United Nations and to reiterate that all illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, especially settlement activities, cannot be recognized, irrespective of the passage of time.

Indeed, any attempt to alter the demographic and legal status of Jerusalem ahead of the final status negotiations is at variance with the letter and spirit of both the Madrid and the Oslo accords. The forcible seizure of lands, the evacuation of Palestinians from the Arab lands in East Jerusalem and the indiscriminate arrest and imprisonment of Palestinians only serve to undermine the basic premise of the peace process, which is the principle of land for peace. We therefore call on Israel to heed international public opinion and put an end to all its illegal activities in the occupied Arab territories, including East Jerusalem.

We also call on Israel to accept the *de jure* applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to all the territories occupied since 1967.

My delegation commends the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories for its detailed and impartial report in document A/52/131/Add.2.

The report makes depressing reading about human rights violations, including collective punishment through closure of the occupied territories; vandalization of Palestinian property by Israeli settlers; discriminatory administrative measures against Arab inhabitants in East Jerusalem in respect of building permits; intensified application of the Israeli policy regarding residency rights of Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem; increased restrictions on freedom of movement, with serious effects on education; administrative detention of children in contravention of article 37 (b) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the continued subjection of Palestinian prisoners to interrogation methods that "amount to torture", to quote the words of the report; and continued manifestation of imbalance in the administration of justice between the sentences handed down to Palestinians as compared with those meted out to Israelis.

These findings must be addressed when concrete measures are drawn up for the revival of the peace process in the region. In the meantime, we call on Israel to implement measures that should safeguard the basic human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs in the occupied territories, including in particular the full application of the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We encourage the Special Committee to continue to investigate and report Israeli policies and practices in the occupied territories, and to this end, we request the

Secretary-General to continue to provide all necessary facilities and assistance to the Committee for the discharge of its mandate.

In the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, signed in Washington, D.C., on 13 September 1993 by the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, a mechanism was agreed upon by the parties for the return of persons displaced in 1967 and during subsequent hostilities in the Middle East. We are concerned that the process agreed upon has not yet been effected, thus complicating the peace process.

We reaffirm the right of all displaced persons to return to their homes or former places of residence in the territories occupied by Israel. We consequently call for an accelerated implementation of the agreed mechanism in accordance with article XII of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. In the meantime, we request the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the displaced persons, and we also appeal to all Member States, organizations and individuals to contribute generously to the Agency and other organizations providing assistance to the displaced persons.

Ghana deplores all acts of terrorism and is relieved at the renewal of security contacts between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government in their joint efforts to fight terrorism. However, we pause to caution that actions that frustrate an already depressed and deprived people are likely to provoke unnecessary tensions and instigate violence by extremists, as recent events testify.

The Palestinian issue is the core of the Middle East conflict and provides the barometer for measuring progress or otherwise in the situation in the whole region. We are thus gratified that, despite the numerous setbacks, both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, under the auspices of the United States, are making determined efforts to resume the negotiations. We encourage them, and emphasize the need for both parties to adhere to the provisions of the agreements already concluded and to take measures to implement them in good faith, without delay and within the time- frame stipulated in the Declaration of Principles, until a permanent settlement is achieved on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and other United Nations resolutions, including those adopted at the tenth emergency special session of this Assembly.

We reiterate our conviction that for a just and comprehensive peace to be achieved in the region, progress must be made on all tracks of the negotiations. In this regard, we call on Israel and Syria to resume talks on the basis of the principle of land for peace. Likewise, we call for renewed efforts to reach a common basis for negotiations on the Israeli-Lebanese track, based on Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Towards this end, and as a confidence-building measure, cross-border attacks must cease.

The dividend that could accrue to the countries of the Middle East region from peace has been the subject of much comment. We welcomed the series of Middle East/North African economic summits that were held annually for the past three years. We regret that due to the deterioration of the situation in the region, most Arab countries boycotted the recent conference in Doha, Qatar. We hope that all concerned will learn a lesson from this and use their best endeavours to create an environment that will be conducive to a resumption of expanded participation in future conferences for the mutual benefit of all the countries of the region, including Palestine.

In this connection we call for the expansion of and increased support for the role of the United Nations in the socio-economic development of the Palestinians. We hope that with the appointment of Chinmaya Gharekhan as Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories the United Nations role in the economic and social fields will be so strengthened as to enable the Organization to contribute meaningfully to the alleviation of the suffering of the Palestinians and their over-dependence on the Israeli economy.

To conclude, permit me to quote the following passage from the letter of the Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, Mr. Herman Leonard de Silva, transmitting the report of the Committee to the Secretary-General:

> "The Special Committee believes that the peace process has reached a decisive stage and that if negotiations are not resumed and the agreements that have already been reached are not fully implemented, the cycle of violence and conflict will continue, thus threatening the peace and stability of

the region. The momentum of the peace negotiations has to be maintained and the Oslo Accords should be implemented in full by both sides and the principle of land for peace underlying the peace agreements should be complied with. The repeated delays in the implementation of the Accords can only endanger the peace process further and could lead to its complete breakdown, which would be dangerous for the whole region.

"It is vital that a dialogue between the parties be maintained and that the peace process continue. All parties concerned should respect the spirit and letter of the Oslo Accords and show renewed commitment to the peace process by an immediate resumption of the peace talks. The frustration and despair of Palestinians have almost completely eroded their trust in the peace process, which is now at a standstill. The peace talks between the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel have also come to a halt. Only tangible progress in peace talks with consequent changes on the ground can bring about a just, comprehensive and lasting peace to the Middle East. All parties concerned must work together to safeguard the peace effort." [A/52/131/Add.2, p. 8]

My delegation fully endorses these sentiments.

Mr. Nuñez-Mosquera (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The item on the situation in the Middle East has been on the General Assembly's agenda for years. Many resolutions have been adopted by this organ at its regular and its special sessions. The consideration of the item is of singular importance and significance this year because of the current situation in the peace process, which is struggling with contradictions and setbacks.

The Palestinian people and the peoples of all the occupied Arab territories find themselves today more than ever before at a crucial moment in their history. The genuine efforts being made to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region continue to meet with serious and hostile incidents provoked by the occupying Power, which persists in its policy of aggression and threat against the entire course of the peace process in the region.

No one is unaware of the fact that this situation is facilitated by the support which the United States gives to Israel on all fronts, in particular in the Security Council, where it does not conceal its determination to veto any resolution containing firm denunciations of the conduct of its strategically in the Middle East.

That support must cease. It is also necessary to express a clear determination to put an end to the occupation of all the Arab and Palestinian territories and to ensure that the letter and spirit of the provisions of the Declaration of Principles, the Cairo Agreement, the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip and all subsequent agreements are respected. It is extremely important, moreover, to see to it that the terms and phases of the peace process endorsed in these international agreements are met.

We must promote the greatest political, legal and moral support of the United Nations for the cause of the Palestinian people and of all the peoples of the occupied Arab territories, and for the peace process in the Middle East.

The General Assembly must ensure greater recognition of the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations for purposes of procedure and his ability to participate in debates. Cuba supports the position of the Arab States Members of this Organization and of the Observer Mission of Palestine that the credentials of Israel not be considered applicable to the occupied Arab territories.

The question of Palestine is at the heart of the conflict in the Middle East and there must be a real will to negotiate to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict as a whole. Cuba reaffirms the right of the Palestinian people to an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital, and rejects measures aimed at changing the legal status and demographic composition of that city. We call for the return of all the occupied Arab territories.

Cuba advocates respect for and the application of the principles and norms of international humanitarian law to the people of Palestine and the peoples of all the occupied Arab territories. In particular, we support the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to Israeli acts in the territory of Palestine and all the occupied Arab territories.

The Palestinian people and the peoples of all the occupied Arab territories need the General Assembly and the United Nations to play an effective and truly committed role in the peace process in the Middle East. Cuba will contribute fully to that objective.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian

People is celebrated on 29 November. On that date in 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which changed the face of history in the Middle East. The resolution partitioned Palestine into two States: one Jewish, the other a State for the Arabs of Palestine, Christian and Muslim alike. It also established an independent legal regime, a *corpus separatum*, for the city of Jerusalem.

The history of the region was changed by that resolution. On the basis of its provisions, the Jewish National Council declared on 14 May 1948 the establishment of the State of Israel. The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel invoked the partition resolution. It stated that Israel would be established

> "on the strength of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly".

In accordance with that resolution, the General Assembly established, alongside the Jewish State, an Arab State in the territory of Palestine. For many reasons and circumstances that cannot be dwelt upon in detail here, that State has never seen the light of day. It might be said, however, that the partition resolution is the birth certificate of two States, not just one. Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi explained that point eloquently and with great logic two days ago.

On another level, the League of Arab States adopted a resolution concerning Palestine in 1948, in which it reaffirmed the independence of Palestine. The General Assembly took the date of 29 November, 1947, into account when it decided in 1997 to establish it as the Day that crystallizes the international community's solidarity with the Palestinian people in its struggle. Moreover, and coincidentally, 22 November 1997 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of its famous resolution 242 (1967), which lays the foundation on which peace in the Middle East should be established: the reaffirmation of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

This is the principle from which flows another extremely important principle, trading land for peace, which has been accepted as the basis of the peace process and its first frame of reference by all the parties to that process, including Israel, since the beginning of the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations in 1977 — twenty years ago — and up until the Madrid Conference in 1991 and the subsequent negotiations and agreements between the Arab parties and Israel.

This recollection of the historical background of an aspect of dealing with the question of Palestine in the United Nations is aimed at highlighting and emphasizing the genuine role of the United Nations in dealing with this question and its historic responsibility for it until a just, lasting and comprehensive peace is achieved.

The delegation of Egypt most regrettably notes that 1997 has not witnessed any real progress on any of the bilateral negotiating tracks between Israel and the Arab parties concerned — namely, the Palestinian Authority, Syria and Lebanon. With regard to the Palestinian track, with the exception of the limited progress achieved by the signing of the Protocol Concerning the Israeli Redeployment in Hebron/Al-Khalil — which the Government of Israel is constantly using as proof of its peaceful orientation despite the fact that it was signed by the previous Israeli Government and then reopened to negotiation under various pressures — the current year has seen many setbacks which have taken the region back to the pre-peace-process atmosphere and to the spirit which prevailed in the region before the Madrid Conference.

We should recall here that these setbacks began with the decision of the current Israeli Government to construct a settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim, south of East Jerusalem. The necessity of condemning that decision was supported by 14 members of the Security Council. But, regrettably, that condemnation was not forthcoming for reasons which are well known to all here. The General Assembly dealt with this subject during its fifty-first session and in an emergency special session — which was resumed twice — during which it decided last month to initiate preparations for convening a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to consider measures which would ensure Israel's respect for its responsibilities under that Convention, which is *de jure* applicable to the occupied Arab territories.

The delegation of Egypt would like to reaffirm an important fact which must not be forgotten by the current Israeli Government: it is impossible for peace to be established in the region with the continued Israeli settlement policy. The position of Egypt in this regard is clear and could be summed up as follows: Egypt restored through negotiations, 20 years ago, all of its territories without any settlements despite the fact that some settlements had been constructed in Sinai when those negotiations took place. This constitutes a basic precedent in the establishment of peace between Israel and the Arab

States. It also places great responsibility on Egypt to reject the attempts and efforts of the Government of Israel to impose settlements on the Arab parties as a *fait accompli* that the Arabs must accept.

Israel is also systematically and intensively endeavouring to alter the geographic and demographic character of the City of Jerusalem. Israel tries by all ways and means to empty it of its Palestinian inhabitants. In this respect, Israel even went to the extent of claiming that they are foreigners living in Jerusalem, in order to bolster the claim that a unified Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the State of Israel. Thus Israel is totally flouting an established reality of international relations, holding on to a claim that only it believes, perhaps because of the frequency with which it repeats that claim.

In this connection, I would also like to refer to the fact that these measures constitute a flagrant violation of Security Council resolutions 465 (1980) and 478 (1980), in addition to violating the Oslo agreement, in which Israel freely accepted that the future of the City of Jerusalem would be one of the subjects of the final status negotiations. I would also like, in this respect, to reaffirm that Israel, as the occupying Power, is obliged under the Fourth Geneva Convention not to alter the demographic composition or the geographic character of the city and the other occupied territories as long as their final status has not been determined through negotiations.

Moving from the Palestinian track to the Lebanese and Syrian tracks, we would regrettably find that the modest steps taken since the beginning of the peace process in 1991 towards bridging the wide confidence gap between the two Arab States on the one hand, and Israel on the other, have come to a halt since May 1996. Indeed, confidence has receded to the level which prevailed in the previous decade. The current Israeli Government alone is responsible for this situation because of its intransigent refusal to recognize the progress which had been achieved in the negotiations between Syria and the previous Israeli Government, as well its refusal to withdraw unconditionally from southern Lebanon, as it is obliged to do under the provisions of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

Egypt links the progress made on the bilateral negotiating tracks on the one hand, and the acceleration of economic cooperation in its various forms and fields on the other. The drive towards peace in the Middle East is an indivisible whole. Normal relations in economic cooperation between the Arab States and Israel cannot come into being, develop or flourish with the deadlock in the peace process, the continued Israeli intransigence through its continued refusal to withdraw from the Arab territories it has occupied since 30 years ago.

For this reason, and in view of the regrettable regression of the peace process in the Middle East which I have just described, Egypt decided not to participate in the regional economic conference held last month. Without question, Egypt hopes that the peace process would witness positive developments which could revive regional cooperation, but on sound bases, and on the basis that Israel would realize that it cannot reap the harvest of benefits of economic cooperation with the States of the region if it continues to deal with its neighbours on the basis of concepts of occupation, condescension, hegemony, disregard for rights or not fulfilling international obligations.

The Permanent Representative of Israel today said that economic cooperation is not a prize which could be given to Israel or withheld from it. We agree with him. It must be very clear that there is an organic and indivisible link between the establishment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace on the one hand, and the promotion of the equal economic cooperation which is of benefit to all without distinction on the other. Using the same logic, we say that the restoration of the occupied territories to their legitimate owners is not a prize to be given to or withheld from the Arabs by Israel according to its whims. The establishment of a comprehensive just and lasting peace is the great prize for which all must strive, because it is the only way to achieve security and prosperity for the peoples of the region.

As I have just said, a just and comprehensive peace is the basis for achieving security. Egypt therefore continues to call for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. This concept is supported by consensus in the General Assembly every year. Egypt has also been calling for the establishment of a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East since the initiative of President Mubarak on 18 April 1990. The Security Council adopted this call in resolution 687 (1991). I should like in this regard to refer to Israel's continued and reiterated refusal to take any confidence-building measures concerning the inspection of its nuclear facilities, which adds to the factors of political tension in the region.

Finally, the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East requires a

different outlook in Israel, an outlook that focuses on clarifying the facts and highlighting the benefits that could be derived from the establishment of peace. But there should be a leadership which truly believes in the achievement of peace. If such leadership does not believe in the feasibility of a just and comprehensive peace and constantly attempts to strip it of all genuine content, failing to comprehend the necessity of reaching a solution in order to construct the peace edifice, then the current peace process, which is now reeling, will collapse, and the Middle East will return to the era of confrontation and tension that prevailed before 1991. We must all act in concert to prevent such an occurrence.

Mr. Park (Republic of Korea): In the view of my delegation, the year 1997 will most likely be recorded as one of the years that saw the least progress in the Middle East peace process since its inception in 1991 on the basis of the "land-for-peace" principle at the Madrid Peace Conference.

Although the international community rejoiced over the momentous agreement to redeploy Israeli forces from Hebron at the beginning of this year, that optimism was, unfortunately, short-lived. As we all know, the mistrust between the Israelis and the Palestinians has intensified in the wake of the Israeli settlement activities, especially in Jebel Abu Ghneim, to the south of East Jerusalem.

At the Security Council meetings held in March to deal with this issue, many delegations, including my own, made it clear that these Israeli measures, which contravene relevant international conventions and Council resolutions, could have serious repercussions on the entire peace process, especially in light of the well-known political sensitivities associated with Jerusalem. At that time, we also emphasized the importance of the adoption by both sides of a prudent and level-headed approach, and we stressed that violence should not be a tool for solving problems.

However, to the dismay of all those who held out strong hope for meaningful progress in the Middle East peace process, the developments following the Israeli construction of housing units in Jebel Abu Ghneim became a source of grave concern. In particular, a series of terrorist bombing attacks, which occurred in Israel in March, July and September, dealt another blow to the peace process while claiming many innocent lives.

Under these circumstances, the United Nations membership even found itself having to convene an emergency special session of the General Assembly — an institutional mechanism never employed in the post-cold-war era — on a problem whose cause seemed so obvious and whose solution so clear-cut.

At this juncture, and in this forum, my delegation has no intention whatsoever of engaging in time-consuming polemics about which side is more to blame for the current impasse in the peace process. We would rather take this opportunity to urge both the Israelis and the Palestinians to reflect on whether the present situation is what they really want, and, if not, to undertake immediately discussions on all remaining questions, including further Israeli redeployment, a Palestinian airport in Gaza and a safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank, as well as the settlement issue, in a candid and open-minded manner.

It should be noted in this regard that through a chain of extreme actions and reactions during the year, the basis of trust laid by Israelis and Palestinians thus far has been eroded to a considerable extent. My delegation is particularly concerned that momentum for the peace process may be irrevocably lost if prudent and courageous steps are not taken in the near future jointly by Israel and Palestine. Indeed, time may not necessarily be on their side.

Having said that, my delegation wishes to emphasize that the Arab-Israeli relationship as a whole should be both perceived and handled as a typical non-zero-sum game. In other words, what one side gains in the bilateral relationship can help the other side achieve its goal, thereby making it possible for both sides to have a win-win situation. We believe that this notion of a non-zero-sum game should underpin not only the relationship between Israel and Palestine but also the Israel-Lebanon and the Israel-Syria tracks, neither of which has made much headway over the past year. The lack of progress in these two areas concerns us, since the Middle East peace process can be complete only when all the components of the Arab-Israeli relationship move forward in accordance with the approach envisioned at the Madrid Peace Conference.

While full recognition of the non-zero-sum nature of the Arab-Israeli relationship is one of the immediate requirements to overcome the deadlock in the Middle East peace process, we believe that increased trade and investment can contribute to creating an environment conducive to regional peace and security. Indeed, based on the belief that peace and development are two sides of

the same coin, my Government has earmarked $15 million for the period 1994-1998 with the aim of assisting rehabilitation projects undertaken by the Palestinian people. It was also in this spirit that my Government participated in the fourth Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference held in Doha last month, which discussed various ways for "Creating a new private/public partnership for trade and economic growth beyond the year 2000".

Clearly recognizing the far-reaching implications that the Middle East carries for world peace and prosperity, the Republic of Korea has consistently supported the peace process in the region and closely followed its implementation. As my delegation emphasized at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly during its debate on the situation in the Middle East, exactly one year ago, we believe that tensions in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship have often stemmed from the impact of domestic politics on international relations. Solutions to these problems, therefore, can also be found in the domestic dimension. While a number of commendable initiatives undertaken by the international community can help to advance the peace process, it goes without saying that the most critical element is for the parties directly concerned to bridge the existing political chasm.

In this vein, we firmly believe that, despite certain setbacks, the truly remarkable progress made since the inception of the peace process proves that both Israelis and Palestinians are capable of mustering the courage, wisdom and patience necessary to overcome the current difficulties.

In closing, my delegation wishes once again to urge both sides to reinject momentum into the stalled peace process and to implement all the agreements within the framework of the Oslo accords so that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace can be established in the Middle East on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

Mr. Al-Adofi (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The Republic of Yemen takes a positive position of support for the Middle East peace process begun at the Madrid conference in October 1991, which called for the attainment of a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of respect for and implementation of binding international resolutions, including Security Council resolutions Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), of successive agreements and the relevant protocols, of the principle of land for peace, and of Israel's complete withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories. In that light, my country reaffirms that only a comprehensive, just and lasting peace can be the basis for security, stability and prosperity in the region and a guarantee that violence and the causes of extremism will be eliminated and tolerance, peaceful coexistence and cultural cooperation among peoples will be promoted.

On the basis of that position, we state our concern at Israel's return to the policy and practice of establishing settlements in Palestinian territories, in particular around the Holy City of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, of building other settlements and destroying Palestinian homes, of constructing bypass roads for Israeli settlers, and of maintaining the blockade of the Palestinian territories. Those Israeli actions are flagrant violations of the agreements Israel has concluded with the Palestinian Authority and will inevitably lead to increased tension and return the Middle East peace process to its starting point or even totally cripple it.

That is why we stress the need for speedy progress towards a final settlement granting the Palestinian people its legitimate rights, particularly its right to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State with its capital at Al-Quds Al-Sharif, in accordance with internationally binding resolutions and with the fundamental principles of the Madrid conference. Negotiations must resume, addressing all aspects on an equal footing and on the basis of the principle of respect by all parties for their commitments.

The Republic of Yemen welcomed the Oslo agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, the Declaration of Principles and related agreements, and all the initiatives, agreements and protocols aimed at a just and comprehensive peace. My country also welcomed the agreement between Jordan and Israel and hopes that this will constitute a step forward towards a just, comprehensive and lasting peace and a prelude to an Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and from southern Lebanon. We call upon the United States, a sponsor of the peace process, to exert pressure on the Israeli Government to resume the peace process, which had made notable progress following the Madrid conference and the adoption of the Declaration of Principles. Israel must dispel the despair felt by peoples of the region at the end of the positive period that preceded the coming to power of the present Israeli Government.

There are many initiatives that the international community could call for to promote the Middle East peace process. Here I would mention the final communiqué of the summit of the Group of Seven plus the Russian Federation, as well as the declarations issued by the Arab Summit held at Cairo, by the summit of the European Union, and by the summit of African Heads of State or Government. Such declarations and communiqués are of great importance because they were issued at summits held after the Middle East peace process had already deteriorated because of the Israeli Government's policy of delaying the resumption of negotiations, failing to live up to agreements, continuing the construction of settlements, persisting in Judaizing Palestinian lands and continuing its blockade of the Palestinian National Authority.

We call upon Israel to comply with the basic tenets of the peace process, in particular the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the principle of land for peace. We urgently appeal to Israel to implement the agreements between Israel and the Palestinians entered into in the framework of the peace process. Israel must understand that it cannot undermine the foundations of the peace process or the need to resume that process. The stakes for all countries are too high to be violated by policies running counter to principles of international law: the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, and the principle of land for peace.

In this context, my country welcomes the declarations of international summits calling upon all the parties concerned to honour their commitments immediately. This is a source of comfort and encouragement with regard to the peace process in the Middle East.

The attainment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East should go hand in hand with ensuring security and stability through equal commitments by all the States of the region to make that region free from nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. It should also go hand in hand with Israel's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the opening of its nuclear facilities to International Atomic Energy Agency inspection as a step towards creating a nuclear-weapon-free zone and freeing the region of the dangers posed by all weapons of mass destruction. This is because the security of States may be guaranteed through a peaceful settlement respecting the rights of all concerned and the interests of all negotiating parties. Negotiations should be based on agreement in all areas — economic, social, cultural and scientific.

The peace process now confronts dangers and risks that hinder the attainment of its objectives. Israeli policy seeks to defer and delay the resumption of negotiations with the Syrian Arab Republic, negotiations which should be based on agreements reached with the previous Israeli Government, in particular the commitment to total withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and occupied southern Lebanon, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the principle of "land for peace".

We equally underscore the need for Israel to commit itself to respect the sovereignty and independence of fraternal Lebanon, release Lebanese prisoners and detainees from Israeli camps and compensate Lebanon for all the damage caused by continuous Israeli aggression against its territory and people.

Finally, I wish to express the hope that the international community will come together in solidarity to encourage a resumption of the Middle East peace process so as to bring about stability in that region and hence international peace and security.

Mr. Owada (Japan): Japan is deeply concerned about the present situation in the Middle East, where virtually no progress has been made towards peace this year. The urgent need for all the parties directly concerned to make their best efforts to set the peace process back on track cannot be over-emphasized at this juncture.

Japan wishes to make one more urgent appeal to all the leaders involved in this regard. Indeed, it is in recognition of the critical importance of the success of this peace process to achieve durable peace in the Middle East that Japan has been actively participating in the peace process by engaging in intensified dialogue with the parties directly concerned, by sending its own contingents to a United Nations peacekeeping operation in the region, and by offering its active contribution to the multilateral talks on the Middle East launched in Madrid in 1991.

It is extremely regrettable that, despite all the efforts by Japan, the United States, the European Union and other interested countries, as well as those made by the United Nations, we have been witnessing a serious reversal in the process, due mainly, in Japan's view, to the hardening of positions in more recent months on the part of the parties concerned. In this dire situation, there is all the more reason to stress that it is the parties directly concerned that should make the greatest efforts,

since it is they who will most directly enjoy the fruits of peace.

In January of this year we had reason to be hopeful that progress could be made on the Palestinian track, when, following a period of difficult negotiations, Israel withdrew its troops from Hebron. But subsequently the parties reverted to a vicious cycle, when the start of construction of Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem triggered a new situation, in which radical Palestinian groups launched terrorist attacks and Israel responded with a series of unilateral steps, including the closure of the West Bank.

While the talks between the Palestinian Authority and Israel were partially resumed in October, thanks to the efforts made by the United States and other interested countries, the positions of the two parties remain deeply divided, and no significant progress in their talks is as yet discernible. In short, the year that began with some renewed hope is ending in profound disappointment.

We in the international community learned of the recent decision of the Israeli Government to withdraw more of its troops from the West Bank, on certain conditions, only to be followed by the Palestinian rejection of that decision on account of the new conditions attached to it by Israel. My delegation feels bound to point out that Israel is required to abide by its solemn obligation under the Oslo accord and the Hebron agreement on the withdrawal of its troops. The decision for redeployment, which in itself may constitute progress on the Palestinian track, has been marred by its vagueness, with regard to the extent of the withdrawal and the specific time-frame, and by the new conditions it imposes, making this decision more contentious. Japan believes that the decision by Israel to withdraw its troops must contain the necessary specifics if it is meant to be genuinely meaningful.

At the same time, my Government continues to emphasize its fundamental opposition to all forms of terrorism, and particularly in this situation, where terrorist acts could threaten the peace negotiations.

My delegation is firmly convinced that it is crucial for the Palestinians and the Israelis to re-establish the relationship of mutual confidence by implementing in good faith the agreements to which they have already committed themselves.

Turning our attention to the Syrian track, we note that here, too, the talks have been at an impasse since February of this year. Japan calls upon both parties to strive to reconcile the differences in their positions and restart the talks as soon as possible.

Nor is progress observable on the Lebanon track. It is most unfortunate that the parties are not engaged in substantive negotiations. Instead, continued hostilities in southern Lebanon are taking a tragic toll in human life, not only among the military, but also among the civilian population. I wish strongly to urge the parties to adhere strictly to the ceasefire they agreed on in April of last year.

Looking at these worrying developments, Japan is profoundly disturbed by the serious setback with which the Madrid process, launched in 1991 amid the hope of the international community, and with its blessing, is being threatened. The danger will be real if the present precarious situation surrounding the Palestinian track is not adequately addressed. The impasse in the peace process, not only on the Palestinian track but on all the tracks, could reduce to naught the precious mutual trust that has been built by the assiduous efforts of the parties involved over the years. It is crucial at this juncture that each of the parties make maximum efforts and strive in good faith to honour its commitments so as to restore the relationship of mutual trust which is so essential to the achievement of lasting peace.

Japan will maintain its commitment to participate actively in the international efforts in support of the Middle East peace process. Japan will make use of every opportunity available to assist the parties directly concerned through strengthening its dialogue with them, and its persuasion, and through offering cooperation for improving the environment to expedite the direct negotiations between the parties.

Japan has been pursuing this approach, particularly with regard to the Palestinian track. It has taken every opportunity to call upon the Israeli Government not to take unilateral actions, such as constructing illegal settlements in the West Bank, that can jeopardize the atmosphere of mutual trust, so essential to progress in the peace process. Thus, the Government of Japan, at its highest level, has brought this issue directly to the attention of the Israeli leadership on a number of occasions, including the official visit of Foreign Minister Levy to Japan in February and the visit of Prime Minister Netanyahu to Japan in August, as well as the visit of the special envoy of the Government of Japan to Israel, where he raised the settlement and other issues directly with Prime Minister Netanyahu. Japan has also

taken every opportunity to appeal to Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian leadership to make every effort to suppress any act of terrorism, and to cooperate with Israel in the maintenance of law and order.

We in Japan believe that economic hardships inflicted upon the Palestinians through such unilateral measures as closure and the freezing of remittances by Israel tend to create a hotbed of violence and terrorist acts in the area. The commitment of Japan to promoting the peace process should be clear from its active participation in providing economic assistance to the Palestinians who are suffering severe economic hardship. In an effort to help stabilize the Palestinian community, Japan recently decided to extend a new aid package of $23.6 million, of which approximately $12.6 million will be allocated to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and $11 million to the United Nations Development Programme — Japan Fund for Palestinian Development. With this new package, Japan's assistance to Palestinians over the years amounts to more than $310 million. Although Japan attaches importance to easing the economic hardships of the Palestinian people, there is a limit to what it can do alone. Its own resources, as well as those of other donor countries, are limited. From this viewpoint, the stalemate in the multilateral talks, talks which could contribute to the enhancement of the welfare of the people, along with the stalemate in each of the tracks, is most regrettable. Japan, as the country chairing of one of the working groups, will continue to work for the promotion of the practical measures under discussion in the multilateral talks.

The contribution by Japan to the peacekeeping missions in the region should also be understood in the same context. Since February of last year Japan has been participating in the United Nations peacekeeping operation deployed in the Golan Heights under the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). Also, in January 1996, the Government of Japan sent to the region a 77-member team, headed by Mr. Obuchi, the present Foreign Minister of Japan, to monitor the Palestinian elections.

The United Nations has been closely linked with the long history of establishing peace in the Middle East, especially through the decisions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, including Security Council resolution 242 (1967). In this sense, the General Assembly and the Security Council have been playing an important role in the effort of the United Nations for peace in the Middle East. However, it should be emphasized once again, by way of a conclusion to my intervention, that the most important and crucial factor for achieving a durable peace is that the parties engage in peace talks in all seriousness and in good faith on the basis of complete mutual trust. It is only on that premise that the international community can make its share of contributions to the peace process, through monitoring the direction in which the peace talks are proceeding, and through creating a favourable environment for sustaining the efforts of the parties directly involved. In the name of the Government of Japan, I wish to pledge that Japan is ready to cooperate with all the parties involved in moving in that direction.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.